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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000380

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/I

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: PRT KIRKUK: PUK SHEDS ITS OWN TO GUARANTEE LOYALTY
TO THE PARTY AND TO RETAIN POWER IN KIRKUK

Classified By: PRT Kirkuk Team Leader Gabriel Escobar for reasons 1.4 (b) AND (b).

[¶1.](#) (U) This is a Kirkuk Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) reporting message.

[¶2.](#) (C) SUMMARY. The Kirkuk chapter of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) is systematically purging party members who they believe are vulnerable to recruitment by opposition party Goran. With the national parliamentary elections less than a month away, PUK has also stepped up its intimidation of opposition party candidates. The combination of the two is an indication of how fearful PUK is of losing its dominant control of Kirkuk. We expect Goran to cannibalize some seats from PUK at the national level as it did at the regional level. However, PUK moves to guarantee loyalty on the Kirkuk Provincial Council and the ministries will likely be an effective measure to retain control of Kirkuk province, at least until there is another provincial election. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND

[¶3.](#) (C) The last provincial elections in Kirkuk province was January 2004. The Sunni boycott of the election resulted in a lopsided win for the Kurds, in particular the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). With the blessing of its coalition partner the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), PUK snapped up a sizeable majority of provincial council (PC) seats and assumed the most important leadership positions (Provincial Council Chair and director generals in most of the ministries). In 2007, a few Sunni Arabs and Turkomans entered into a power-sharing agreement with the Kurds for participation on the PC. However, they currently hold only 15 of the 41-seat PC. Due to the disputed status of Kirkuk, no provincial elections can be scheduled. The longer that the current political make-up of the PC continues, the more PUK believes that it is entitled to the leadership positions it holds.

2010 NATIONAL ELECTIONS

[¶4.](#) (C) The 2010 national parliamentary elections will be the first real opportunity for other parties to contest PUK's control of Kirkuk province. The greatest threat to PUK's dominance comes from the Kurdish opposition party Goran Movement, which draws increasing support from disillusioned PUK members. To counter defections, PUK's local party Chief Rifat Hussein and PC Chair Rizgar Ali have begun a campaign of intimidation on director generals and PC members who they believe may jump to Goran.

[¶5.](#) (C) Over a period of two weeks, Awad Amin, an independent politician and political analyst reported that both the Director General of Municipalities Jamal Shakur and

the Director General of Health Sabah Zanganawere replaced with more loyal and less competent party members. Hussein declared to PRTOffs on February 7 that "PUK has nothing to hide. We provide these people with financial support and place them in politically appointed jobs. Why shouldn't we get rid of them if they begin to show open support for other parties?"

16. (C) PUK PC member Almas Fadhil told PRTOffs that she was removed from the electoral list because PC Chair questioned her loyalty. A life long PUK member, Fadhil insisted she had given no reason for the PUK to question her loyalty. She added that she had begun to build her base far in advance of the March elections. She expressed fear that PUK may remove her from the PC and alluded that others may be pushed out as well.

PUK INTIMIDATION OF OTHER PARTIES

17. (C) On February 8 Goran Movement Leader in Kirkuk Jalal Jawhar alleges that PUK's intelligence officers "Assayesh" have repeatedly told Goran members, "Why would you support someone who will likely be assassinated before the election?" Jawhar also claimed that women running on the Goran ticket are receiving harassing phone calls and letters. Not only has Goran faced intimidation. On February 3 independent party Citadel leader Sami Jaf told PRTOffs that PUK leaders (said they had a coalition exploring meeting with PUK leaders but did not name who) ordered him to join his members with PUK's or drop out of the race. Jaf appealed to the PRT for protection and support.

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18. (C) COMMENT. PUK's aggressive and abrupt tactics on its own membership is a reflection of how shakened Talabani was by the number of PUK defectors who voted for Goran in the KRG parliamentary elections. PUK lost the majority seats in its home court, Sulemaniyah. As a result, President Talabani and the PUK are in a struggle to regain equal footing with its coalition partner the Kurdistan Democratic Party. PUK can ill afford to concede seats to any opposition party at the regional or national level. Nor can it lose control of Kirkuk at the provincial level. At least for now, with no prospect of provincial elections on the horizon, PUK's grip on Kirkuk will likely remain intact. END COMMENT.

FORD